

First Regiment Infantry Armory
1552 South Michigan Avenue
(northwest corner of South Michigan
Avenue and East 16th Street)
Chicago
Cook County
Illinois

HABS No. ILL-1069

HABS
ILL,
16-CHIG,
69-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
801 19th Street, N. W.
Washington, D. C.

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. ILL-1069

FIRST REGIMENT INFANTRY ARMORY

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Location: 1552 South Michigan Avenue (northwest corner of South Michigan Avenue and East 16th Street), Chicago, Cook County, Illinois.

Present Owner: Leo Selzer (Central Standard Life Insurance Company).

Present Use: Destroyed in 1967.

Statement of Significance: Designed by the firm of Burnham and Root in 1890, the Armory is an impressive, though rather curious work from their oeuvre. According to contemporary accounts, the building was designed to serve as a true medieval-type fortification, with a heavily protected arched door, firing slits, and battlements. In addition, interior provisions were made for the training and accommodation of the regiment, as well as for its social functions. The ornamental stone and brick mass of the exterior could indeed withstand a siege, if only symbolically. The severe cubic form with battered masonry walls and a great central arch recall the earlier, more sophisticated designs of H. H. Richardson.

PART 1. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: Legal description of the property: the east 172-1/16' of the south 163-3/4' of Block 32 in Assessors Division of part of the northwest fractional quarter section 22-39-14; recorded May 7, 1855.

The complete chain of title is found in Book 501, pp. 383-84, 350 $\frac{1}{2}$, in the Cook County Recorder's Office; an abstract of this record follows: On January 1, 1890, the First Infantry Armory Association leased the land from its owner Marshall Field (Document 1243196). The Association transferred the title for the lease and building to the Illinois Trust and Savings Bank on November 1, 1890 (Document 1384659), while Marshall Field appears to have owned the land well into the 20th century. On March 20, 1944 Lois R. and Leo A. Selzer *et al.* are mentioned in connection with the 131st Armory Building, the building's later name (Document 44C3212). According to the last series of entries, the deed was in the hands of Leo Selzer, Central Standard Life Insurance, and Chicago Title and Trust Company (August 9, 1961; Documents 182240847-9).

2. Date of erection: 1890-91 (never entirely completed inside): rebuilt after fire damage in 1894.
3. Architects: Burnham and Root; the original conception is said to have been Burnham's with Root going on to develop the exterior design in greater detail /Harriet Monroe, John Wellborn Root, A Study of His Life and Work (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1896), p. 124/.
4. Original plan, construction, etc.: There are several early descriptions of the Armory. "Design for First Regiment Armory, Chicago," Inland Architect, Vol. 13 (June 1889), p. 92, carried the following description accompanying the architects' rendering (P. F. Newberry, del., 3-7-89):

Design for First Regiment Armory, Chicago; Burnham and Root, architects. First thirty-five feet above ground to be of vitrified brown brick. The large sally port is the only opening in the four stone walls, and the reveals of this port are 10 feet deep, and this opening itself 40 feet wide. The door is protected by a portcullis of chains and bars of steel, which can be raised out of sight. The base of the windows above the stonework are 6 feet from the floor and have long narrow slots running downward through which riflemen can fight when the occasion demands. In the brick walls above are several small windows for light and ventilation, protected by heavy basket gratings, as are the rifle slots in the ones below. Four great bastions crown the angles of the fortress from which soldiers may deliver an enfilade fire on any side of the walls. The top of the walls is surmounted by a medieval cornice or parapet. Projecting as it does over the wall proper, and penetrated at the base with rifle slots, a handful of men could withstand an army. The entrance opens into the drill floor, 150 feet by 168 feet in surface. The sides of this room are enclosed by walls of red brick extending to the second floor. A huge baronial fireplace is at one end of the room and there is a band balcony. A smooth-finished black oak floor reflects the light from a 120 by 70 feet skylight above the third floor. Galleries extending around the second and third floors form an immense court. The two stories above, reached by a broad staircase on either side of the main entrance, have rooms about the court, opening on the galleries. In the second story are the colonel's and officers' ante-chamber adjoining. On the same floor is a large room for the board officers of the regiment, which may be used, when the occasion demands, as a banqueting room, kitchen and serving rooms being connected with it. On either side of the colonel's room are the rooms of the lieutenant-colonel, quartermaster, chaplain, inspector of rifle practice, major and surgeon. In the northwest corner is the library.

Twelve company club rooms, each 20 by 40 feet, with fireplace, and the captains' private room are also on this floor. On the third floor, immediately over the club rooms and connected with them by staircases, are the lockers of the companies, each separate from the other. In the front center of this floor are locker-rooms of orderlies attached to colonel, adjutant, quartermaster, surgeon, engineer, and the hospital. At the right of the building is the spacious room of the veterans, and in the left the gymnasium, which in case of war is to serve as a hospital. The rear of this floor is given up to the drum and bugle corps and a shower bath capable of admitting twenty men at a time. Two rifle ranges, with six targets each, are in the basement. The targets are backed with iron so arranged that bullets after performing their mission drop into a hole, where they are gathered and remolded. In the center of the basement are four bowling alleys. On either side are closets, store rooms, heating apparatus, and ammunition and armor vaults. An hydraulic elevator provides an easy ascent to the upper stories. From the basement is the only entrance, except the main one, to the building. This is so amply provided with gates, bolts and locks that any attempt to force an entrance would be practically an impossibility.

In 1891 a similar lengthy description was published in "The Armory of the First Regiment, I.N.G.", Industrial Chicago, Vol. 2 (Chicago: The Goodspeed Publishing Company, 1891), pp. 587-89, which included this additional information:

The building was to house the 1st Regiment of the Illinois National Guard. "The Design is to the last degree military, and can not fail to impress the passer-by with the full extent of its purpose and the ability to carry it out." The corner stone was laid in April, 1890, under construction until August of 1891. The regiment occupied the building in September, 1891; however, the interior was not yet finished due to difficulties in fund raising which had caused construction to stop several times: ". . . the quarters had not been finished and will not be for some time to come." At the time of the Industrial Chicago article \$150,000 had been secured, \$70,000 of which by bonding the property; \$16,000 remained unsold. The remaining funds were to be secured through the efforts of Charles L. Hutchinson and John J. Mitchell of the Board of Armory Trustees.

The writer concluded with this criticism of the structure: "A pleasant feature is to be the social life in the armory. The floor of the main hall is of hardwood, highly polished, and will be kept in excellent condition for dancing. With this in view the men will be required to wear rubber-soled shoes while drilling. The only feature requiring criticism is the hanging of the great main door. This weighs twelve

thousand eight hundred pounds, and is balanced by a large weight, making the entire strain twenty-five thousand six hundred pounds, which is supported on five single pulleys, attached to a light beam, secured to the ceiling of the second floor."

Harriet Monroe [op. cit.], p. 110/ published the following anecdote concerning the Armory design:

"All that I did," he would say, "was hastily done; tentative, immature, imperfect; give it the charity of silence." When the projectors of the First Regiment Armory suggested that the signature of the firm be carved into its corner-stone, Root refused; adding with one of his swift smiles, "We may do better ten years from now." None thought so highly as he of his achievements. . .

In 1915, A. N. Rebori, "The Work of Burnham & Root, D. H. Burnham - D. H. Burnham and Co., and Graham Burnham and Co.", Architectural Record, Vol. 38, No. 7 (July 1915), p. 41 said the following of the building:

We have seen that in the old Academy of Fine Arts Building the architects obtained what may fairly be called an individual version of Romanesque. But they also practiced much in the free and Romantic style which aims not primarily at elegance, but at an effect of massiveness and vigor, and which has for its first object to break in upon the spectator's apathy. A most effective and conspicuous work of this kind is the First Illinois Regiment Armory, with its single great entrance or sally port burrowed into the solid lofty basement of rough granite, and with its superstructure of brick work dotted with small openings, crowned with a single machicolated cornice, strengthened at the corners with vigorous barbicans. The slope of the wall is emphasized by making vertical the face of the central motif in which the entrance arch is cut, and the carefully placed double rows of company room windows in the brick wall high above, adds to the expressiveness of the design. This structure as a whole attains a nobleness of aspect which the designer has been careful not to impair by the use of a single bit of ornament. It also shows a keen appreciation on the part of the architects of a problem which permits the use of large wall surfaces to a greater extent than almost any other type of building without violating the practical requirements. Some interesting essays have lately been made in military architecture, but it would be hard to name one of them superior in point of vigor and effectiveness to the First Regiment Armory. We must further bear in mind that this armory was completed in 1882 [sic], when architecture was indeed at a very low ebb.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

The original First Regiment Infantry Armory was located at 65 East Jackson Street in the Chicago Loop /Frank A. Randall, History of the Development of Building Construction in Chicago (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1949), p. 303/.

C. Bibliography:

"The Armory of the First Regiment, I.N.G.," Industrial Chicago, Vol. 2 (Chicago: The Goodspeed Publishing Company, 1891). pp. 587-9.

"Design for First Regiment Armory, Chicago," Inland Architect, Vol. 13 (June 1889). pp. 90,92.
No plan, full description.

"First Regiment Armory, Chicago," Inland Architect, Vol. 18, No. 6 (January 1892). Pl. fol. p. 80.

Monroe, Harriet. John Wellborn Root, A Study of His Life and Work. Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1896. pp. 110, 124.

Randall, Frank A. History of the Development of Building Construction in Chicago. Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1949.

Rebore, A. N. "The Work of Burnham & Root, D. H. Burnham - D. H. Burnham and Co., and Graham Burnham and Co.," Architectural Record, Vol. 38, No. 7 (July 1915). pp. 41-47.

Siegel, Arthur (Ed.). Chicago's Famous Buildings. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965. p. 78.

Additional information might be available from the records of the Illinois National Guard. No attempt was made to locate any such documents for this report.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Designed by the firm of Burnham and Root in 1890, the Armory is an impressive, though rather curious work from their oeuvre. According to contemporary accounts, the building was designed to serve as a true medieval-type fortification, with a heavily protected arched door, firing slits, and battlements. In addition, interior provisions were made for the training and accommodation of the regiment, as well as for its social functions. The ornamental stone and brick mass of the exterior could indeed

withstand a siege, if only symbolically. The severe cubic form with battered masonry walls and a great central arch recall the earlier, more sophisticated designs of H. H. Richardson.

2. Condition of fabric: The building was destroyed in 1967. Following is a description of the building in 1965: the lower stonework, especially at the northeast and southeast corners, is badly weathered, and much of the mortar lost. The upper brick facing has been repaired repeatedly; most of the windows are broken or boarded over. At present, the structure serves primarily as a support for billboards and painted signs.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Almost square, three stories plus basement.
2. Foundations: Masonry.
3. Wall construction: The walls were red brick, faced with rough-surfaced brownstone and red mortar below.
4. Structural system, framing: Masonry-bearing walls, with iron frame to support ceiling and central skylight.
5. Porches: The main entrance was up two steps and through the large compound-arched entrance which had been closed by a row of doors. On the southeast corner a cornerstone carried the following inscription:

FIRST INFANTRY ARMORY
BUILT 1890
BURNED APRIL 25th 1893
REBUILT 1894

TRUSTEES:
JOHN J. MITCHELL
H. H. KOHLSAAT
WALTER L. PECK
CHAS. L. HUTCHINSON
COL. HENRY L. TURNER
LIEUT. COL. GEO. V. LAUMAN
CAPT. A. L. BELL

6. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: Two garage-type doors were placed in the west wall.

- b. Windows: Originally the arched openings contained a lunette-shaped pane with two smaller rectangular panes below. An arcade of narrow arched openings pierced the walls just below the parapet.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Flat roof, broken in the center by a gabled skylight.
- b. Cornice, eaves: Parapet with brownstone coping.
- c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: There were turrets at each corner; like most of the upper brickwork, these were painted over in the last years of the building's existence.

C. Description of Interior:

- 1. General: The interior is organized around the central drill area, which is lighted by the skylight. Three tiers of galleries surround this uninterrupted space; these are broken up by office partitions. In 1965 the entire interior was a ruin, inhabited by pigeons and serving as a miscellaneous storage area. It appeared that the building at one time served as an automobile showroom.
- 2. Lighting, type of fixtures: Incandescent lights hung on cords from the ceiling, in 1965.

D. Site:

General setting and orientation: The armory was located south of the Chicago Loop in a rather desolate commercial and manufacturing area. It was bounded on three sides by streets, and on the fourth, by an alley. The elevated tracks of the Illinois Central abutted the building on the north.

Prepared by Larry J. Homolka
Historian and Assistant
Supervisor
National Park Service
August 1965

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